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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Soviet Stakes in the
Indian-Pakistani Conflict

1. The coincidence of US and Soviet aims in the Indian-Pakistani conflict has become increasingly clear. Identity of interest for the USSR and the US, however, has not always facilitated practical agreement on a common course of action. Despite mutual interest in stability on the Indian subcontinent and opposition to Chinese objectives, the Soviet-US relationship with regard to India and Pakistan is primarily one of intense rivalry and competition for power and influence in these countries. In addition, while weighing possible moves in the current conflict, Moscow must give careful consideration to potential repercussions within the Communist world--especially in view of the Vietnamese crisis. These considerations together with the USSR's present determination to alienate neither India nor Pakistan would seem to preclude under present conditions any obvious Soviet-US course of action to further common objectives.

2. Both Moscow and Washington have already called for an immediate cease-fire and a return to the status quo ante. The situation has proved embarrassing to both governments and has forced them into a rather delicate balancing act. Both the US and the USSR recognize that only China can profit from the current struggle on the subcontinent and therefore each hopes to prevent Peking from deriving significant gains from further extensions of the conflict.

3. Although there is a note of urgency in the recent series of Russian pronouncements of Indian-Pakistani hostilities, the Soviet Union probably considers that the situation has not reached real crisis proportions involving the direct national interests of the USSR, or requiring a modification in Soviet policy on the subcontinent. Moscow rather appears intent on avoiding any strong initiatives--at least until the military situation is clarified and both sides give some indication that they are amenable to suggestions or willing to use "good offices" for a peaceful settlement. The spate of official statements over the past week has not added appreciably to the points made in the original Soviet government statement of 7 September. Indian representatives, however, have probably exaggerated their recent conversations with Soviet officials in an attempt to claim more support for New Delhi's position than was probably the case.

4. Moreover, in addition to expressing Russian concern and appealing for a dampening of Indian-Pakistani tensions, such pronouncements are designed to further the broader Soviet policy goals. Moscow is thereby attempting to under-score its advocacy of peaceful settlement of international disputes and contrasts its posture with the "incendiary statements" emanating from Peking. The Soviets also call further attention to their active involvement in Afro-Asian affairs during the weeks leading up to the next attempt to convene the Second Afro-Asian Conference this fall in Algiers. Izvestia has pointed out the similarity between Soviet efforts for a peaceful solution and those made by other leaders of the nations of Africa and Asia. By focusing on Indian-Pakistani hostilities, Moscow may also hope to divert attention from its inability to prevent a more massive US build-up and deepening commitment in Vietnam.

5. On the other hand, the Soviets have ample reason to be genuinely concerned. For example, more active Chinese involvement in the Indian-Pakistani conflict--perhaps in the form of skirmishes on the Sino-Indian border--is a contingency Moscow is probably most anxious to prevent. Such a widening of the war might necessitate significantly deeper Soviet involvement and would confront the Soviets

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with distasteful policy alternatives. In the event of Chinese attacks on India, the USSR might feel compelled to accede to Indian requests for military and economic support. This would reverse Moscow's recent gains in Pakistan and the Sino-Soviet conflict. Khrushchev's successors have attempted to prevent, if possible, a return to the high decibel count of the Sino-Soviet polemics of last year. They may also be reluctant to overextend Soviet commitments by deepening Moscow's involvement in support of India.

6. Although the Soviets have stressed their "traditional friendship" with India, and have largely avoided the basic issue of self-determination for the people of Kashmir, they have shown themselves to be reluctant to alienate the Pakistanis. Recent efforts by the USSR to improve relations with Pakistan are part of a concerted campaign to increase Russian prestige and influence elsewhere along its southern border, notably in Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan. Thus Moscow appears determined, if at all possible, not to antagonize Pakistan, or drive it into the open arms of either Peking or Washington. In sum, Moscow clearly hopes to prevent the situation from developing in such a way as to force a definitive choice between support for India or Pakistan.

7. Recent developments, however, have created an unusual, if not unique situation in which Soviet and US aims do in large measure coincide. The Russians have shown themselves prepared to openly defy the Chinese in the past. The signing of the partial nuclear test-ban treaty is certainly one of the more striking examples. In the current controversy, the Soviets have already--through indirect--criticized the Chinese for "adding fuel to the flames." The Soviets are clearly sensitive to Chinese charges of Soviet-US collaboration. If at some future point, however, Moscow considers the time propitious, or feels compelled to take some strong initiative, it would probably feel less vulnerable by taking some sort of joint action within the framework of the UN. The Soviets have already endorsed the Security Council resolutions of 4 and 6 September and the efforts of U Thant.

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SOVIET STAKES IN THE INDIAN-PAKISTANI CONFLICT

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

Office of Current Intelligence

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